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OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

South Vietnamese Action in Laos

7 May 1961

The concern of President Diem and other South Vietnamese high officials over Communist gains in Laos was heightened considerably over the past few weeks by the expansion of Communist military activity in southern Laos. The Laotian government's progressive loss of several important posts there in March and April brought the enemy steadily closer to Thakhek, and additional government reverses along Route 9 in the Pha Lane-Tchepone area in late April-early May apparently served to crystallize Diem's thinking and persuade him to take some positive action in southern Laos. Diem told Ambassadors Harriman and Durbrow on 2 May that he considered Pakse, Saravane, Attapeu and Tchepone vital to South Vietnam's security.

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[redacted]
[redacted] on 1 May General Phoumi requested South Vietnamese military reinforcements in southern Laos. The request

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State Department review completed

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reportedly was made through the South Vietnamese liaison officer who has for some time been stationed in Savannahket.

On 2 May, Diem was reported preparing to call an emergency cabinet meeting that night to decide on the degree of immediate South Vietnamese assistance in southern Laos and on further action required. Diem was quoted as saying that as a result of the grave threat to South Vietnam posed by Vietnamese Communists and Pathet Lao overrunning the Tchepone district, the south Vietnamese government must take immediate emergency countermeasures, including military action.

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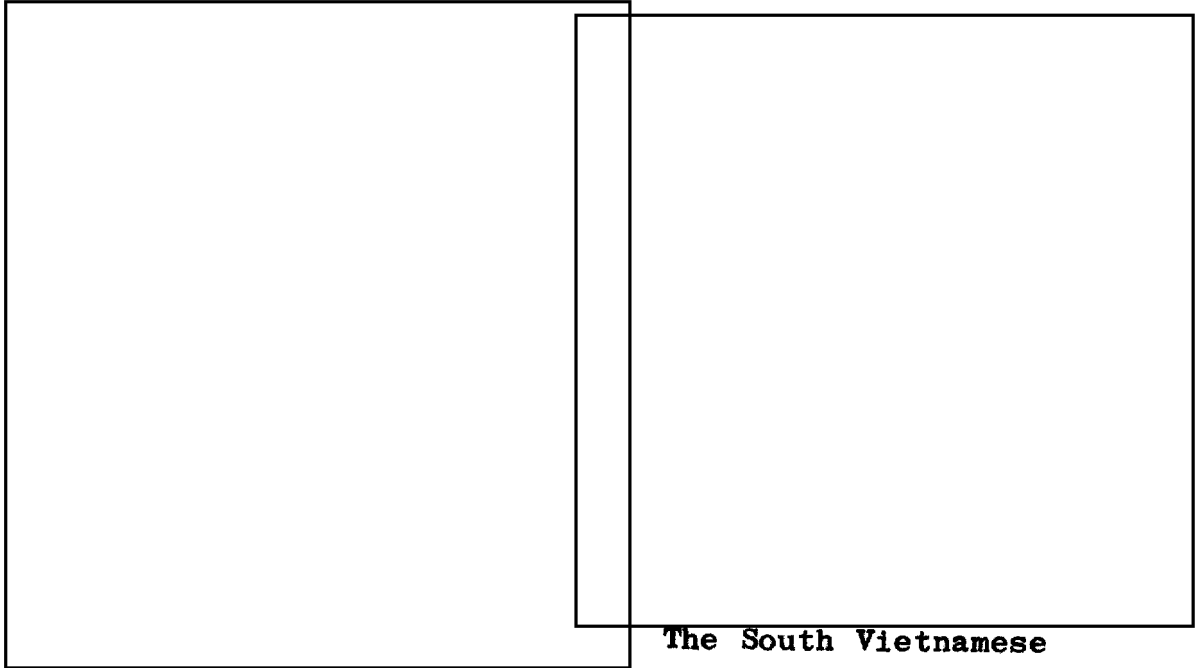
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Vietnam, report intelligence on enemy activities within the perimeter, and send out reconnaissance patrols.

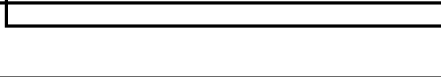
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The South Vietnamese army has estimated that there are about 2000 Vietnamese Communist troops located along and north of Route 9, with about two battalions each in Muong Phine and Tchepone. The nature and extent of North Vietnamese involvement in this area, however, is not yet clear.



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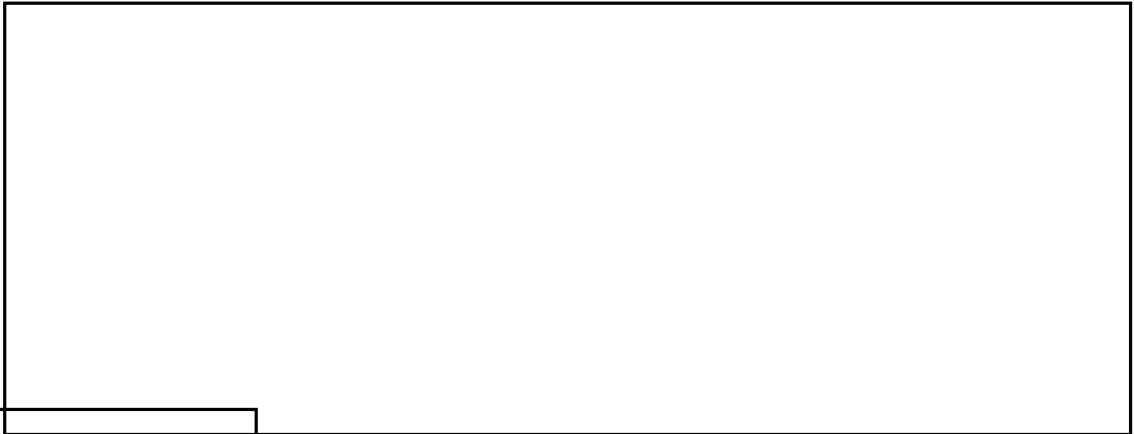
As of 7 May the situation was stabilized, with nothing more than defensive activity and routine reconnaissance patrols on either side.

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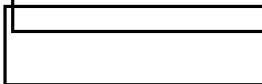
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Vietnamese fighter aircraft are reported to be located at Pleiku on an alert basis to conduct possible airstrikes within the six-mile perimeter west of Lao Bao.

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